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The  
PASSIONS of  
JOHN WESLEY

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

*by John McTavish  
and Judith Brocklehurst*

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Nashville

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AT CLAREMONT  
California

THE PASSIONS OF JOHN WESLEY

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## A NOTE ABOUT THE PLAY

*The Passions of John Wesley* is a historical play and the major characters and incidents portrayed are generally correct. In order to heighten the drama and serve dramatic purposes, *some characters and speeches have been created where there is no clear historical record*. These characters are marked with an asterisk. We hope this imaginative reconstruction, however, remains faithful to the spirit of John Wesley.

## A NOTE FOR THE PROGRAM

The play opens with John Wesley on his deathbed.

In his dying moments, he relives his whole life, seeing himself first of all as a courageous six-year-old—the little “brand plucked out of the burning.” He was brought up under the loving, but rigorous discipline of his mother, who was convinced that God held a special destiny for her child. He became a dour Oxford student and then a stiff young missionary with hopelessly repressed romantic longings.

Those longings plunged the young Wesley into a painful relationship with eighteen-year-old Sophy Hopkey in Georgia. The story of this tragic episode was buried in Wesley’s private diaries, in which he used a complex number-and-letter code. The cipher was transcribed just recently.

The disaster of his relationship with her and his troubles with the colonists caused his ignominious return to England. Then, devastated in mind and sick of heart, he had the crucial Aldersgate experience. The obsessive, unlovable priest died. The new man, born of this experience, went out and gave England back to God. John Wesley’s passionate love of Christ and of his neighbor was a gift to the world reflecting that passion which we speak of when, our eyes on the cross, we contemplate the passion of our Lord.

## PRODUCTION NOTE

This play was not written for an elite group of good actors. It is intended for people who want to pay tribute to John Wesley and to share in the fun of acting. Though the doubling plan provided allows for a cast of twelve men and eight women, there is literally no maximum number of people who can participate. Anyone who wants to take part, even if he or she cannot read, need not be turned away. We believe that’s important in a play about the founding father of Methodism.

We put Wesley on his deathbed at the beginning of the play for a reason: we wanted to show his journey from legalism to grace. In act 1 the bed symbolizes that prison of legalism. Though the Wesley character may stand beside it, or sit at its edge, he never breaks free of it until after his conversion experience.

The play can be produced easily in a chancel or on a stage and requires a minimum of props and staging. Unless you have a really big crowd, a small stage gives better focus and tension. Scenes should follow one another without a break. The only onstage scene change (between scenes 3 and 4 of act 2) must be rehearsed until it can be done *fast*.

Fortunately, costumes for this period are simple. Men wear knee-length, full-skirted coats, knee-length breeches, stockings, and buckled shoes. The dignitaries are the only ones who wear wigs. Women wear long dresses with wide collars or lace trim and full skirts (but no hoops or crinolines). Cloaks or shawls are worn for warmth. Men wear three-cornered hats that are easy to make; women wear wide-brimmed hats or caps.

John and Charles Wesley should wear tidy, but not expensive-looking clothes, black, as befits ordained ministers of the Church of England.

Susanna and Samuel Wesley were very poor; Susanna was in her thirties when John was born. Sophy should be very simply dressed, in fresh, pretty colors. Mrs. Causton and Beata Hawkins should wear rather dirty finery.

In the field preaching scene the crowd should look very dirty and neglected. In the "meeting" scene, the people in the crowd, though still poorly dressed, should look clean and tidy.

The most vital prop is the bed. It must be sturdy yet light enough to be moved easily. Wesley should be propped up in the bed so he can be seen.

From the very beginning this play has been intended for amateur groups with limited experience and resources. However, the portrayal of the character of John Wesley himself and his change from a narrow-minded cleric to the warmhearted field preacher is vitally important to the success of the production. It may be helpful for you to know more about the man Wesley.

In his book *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, vol. 2, Richard P. Heitzenrater writes of John Wesley: "His renown . . . was not based upon any remarkable speaking ability or spellbinding oratorical skills. . . . The tone of his voice was described variously as 'clear,' 'pleasant,' and 'conversational.' He apparently did not put on a dramatic show.

...  
"Wesley's ability to gather a crowd and hold their attention was grounded in what he said, rather than how he said it. . . . The crowds were often held spellbound in part by the simple impression of his 'venerable form.' He was frequently described as having an 'apostolic' appearance, as in the following description by one of his preachers, John Hampson:

"... Few have seen him without being struck by his appearance; and many who have been greatly prejudiced against him have been known to change their opinion the moment they have been introduced into his presence. . . . In dress, he was a pattern of neatness and simplicity. A narrow, plaited stock; a coat with a small upright collar; no buckles at his knees; no silk or velvet in any part of his apparel, and a head as white as snow, gave an idea of something primitive and apostolic; while an air of neatness and cleanliness was diffused over his whole person" (pp. 83-84).

## CHARACTERS

### JOHN WESLEY

MRS. ROGERS, Methodist women

\*MRS. BUCKINGHAM,

ELIZABETH RITCHIE, housekeeper

SUSANNA WESLEY, Wesley's mother

SAMUEL WESLEY, Wesley's father

\*KATE, servant girl

\*TYERMAN, neighbor

\*MANNERS, wealthy Oxford graduates

\*FAIRACRES,

\*FITZROY,

CHARLES WESLEY, John's brother

BENJAMIN INGHAM, friend of John and Charles

SOPHY HOPKEY, young woman

DR. HAWKINS, doctor to the Georgia colonists

\*CONSTABLE, one of the Georgia colonists

BEATA HAWKINS, outspoken and ill-tempered  
 MRS. CAUSTON, rough and ambitious aunt of Sophy Hopkey  
 WILLIAM WILLIAMSON, Sophy's bridegroom  
 PETER BÖHLER (pronounced "Burr-ler"), Moravian minister  
 \*READER  
 \*SUSAN DELL, an older woman  
 \*BEN, young boy  
 \*GRACE PLOWMAN, should have a pleasant voice to sing solo in act 2, scene 3  
 \*MARTHA, working young women, poorly dressed  
 \*CATHERINE,  
 \*HANNAH,  
 \*JANE, working-class women  
 \*MARY,  
 \*DAN, working-class men  
 \*EDWARD,  
 \*PHILIP,  
 \*DR. BULKELEY, rich Anglican clergyman  
 \*MR. MIDDLETON, Anglican clergyman, assistant to the bishop  
 \*BISHOP  
 \*MR. HORNE, chaplain to the bishop, nervous and timid  
 \*TWO CONSTABLES, no uniform, but official-looking hats and big sticks  
 \*FINAL SOLOIST, JULIA, can double with any member of the cast

Members of the cast can double as crowd at Wesley's bedside (act 1, scene 1), congregation (act 1, scene 6), workers (act 2, scene 1) and deathbed (act 2, scene 5).

### A PROPOSED DOUBLING PLAN

Act 1			Act 2
Samuel Wesley	can also play		Middleton
Tyerman	" " "		Bishop
Manners	" " "		Edward
Fairacres	" " "		Ben
Fitzroy	" " "		Dan
Benjamin Ingham	" " "		First Constable
Dr. Hawkins	" " "		Second Constable
Constable	" " "		Horne
William Williamson	" " "		Bulkeley
Peter Böhler	" " "		Philip
Mrs. Rogers	" " "		Susan Dell
Mrs. Buckingham	" " "		Martha
Elizabeth Ritchie	" " "		Hannah
Susanna Wesley	" " "		Jane
Kate	" " "		Grace Plowman
Beata Hawkins	" " "		Catherine
Mrs. Causton	" " "		Mary

John Wesley, Charles Wesley, and Sophy Hopkey cannot double.

Asterisk indicates character was created for dramatic effect.

## ACT I

### Scene I

*(As the house lights dim, a solo instrument—a flute is a good choice—is heard playing "The Church's One Foundation" [tune: Aurelia] very quietly. Stage lights go up showing a very simply furnished room dominated by a narrow wooden bed near the center. The head of the bed should be slightly raised for better visibility. Wesley, wrapped in a shawl, his head bandaged, is propped up in the bed. His weakness and distress make it evident that he is dying. Men, women, and children are gathered quietly around the bedside, wiping away tears, praying, or murmuring anxiously to one another. After a moment or two, Mrs. Buckingham enters with a taper and lights a candle on a small table by the bed. Mrs. Rogers takes her arm and leads her downstage, right.)*

- MRS. ROGERS: Where is Dr. Whitehead? His carriage should have been here an hour ago. Doesn't he know his patient is a saint?
- MRS. BUCKINGHAM: Of course he knows. All of England knows.
- MRS. ROGERS: Then why isn't he here?
- MRS. BUCKINGHAM: Mr. Wesley did not request his presence. *(Turns away, crosses to stage left, and sits down on chair)*
- MRS. ROGERS: *(Following her)* What are you saying, woman! The doctor might save his life.
- MRS. BUCKINGHAM: *(Looking up in wearied resignation)* Mrs. Rogers, John Wesley is almost eighty-eight years old. He has preached three times a day for more than fifty years. He has ridden thousands of miles on horseback. He's been stoned, spat upon, thrown in the mud. How much longer do you expect the man to go on?
- MRS. ROGERS: I know that. But if only we could secure a medical opinion—
- MRS. BUCKINGHAM: *(Wipes her eyes)* The only physician he needs now is Jesus.
- JOHN WESLEY: *(Feebly)* Friends, friends. *(Several people move closer)* Not so close. You must leave me now. Today—today is dying day. *(The crowd, glancing at one another, perturbed, depart murmuring. For a moment Wesley is alone.)*
- JOHN WESLEY: Elizabeth, Elizabeth *(Pause, then with all his feeble might)*, Elizabeth!
- ELIZABETH: *(Rushes on)* Yes, Mr. Wesley. I'm here.
- JOHN WESLEY: I feel life ebbing from me. My sermon on the love of God. Get it, Elizabeth. Spread it abroad. Give copies to everyone!

ELIZABETH: But—but—

JOHN WESLEY: (*Forcefully*) Hurry, woman. The time is short.

ELIZABETH: But can I do nothing for you, sir?

JOHN WESLEY: (*Agitatedly*) Nothing—nothing. I would be buried in nothing but woolen. No silk or fabric must adorn the coffin. And the coffin itself I want placed in—in the—Oh, Elizabeth, I'm so cold.

ELIZABETH: (*Feels his hands and forehead*) Yes, you are cold, you poor soul. That fire has died down. I'll stir it up. (*Elizabeth goes upstage and rattles poker; lighting changes to simulate flames.*)

JOHN WESLEY: —the coffin I want placed in the—woman, water! Fetch me some water— (*As Elizabeth hurries offstage left, the "normal" lighting is replaced by dimness, with one spot on Wesley.*)—the chapel. Yes, I want it placed in God's house. For the best of all is—God is with us. From beginning to end he's shown me nothing but kindness—full measure, pressed down and overflowing. I was six years old that night, six little years—and his hand reached down and plucked me like a brand out of the fire—fire! (*The lighting suggests red, flickering flames as light from the fireplace fills the room. Wesley, panicking, raises a hand to shield his face and knocks the candle over.*) Oh, those hot flames are leaping at me now. The house is on fire! Johnny, now don't be afraid. Johnny. . . Johnny, think clearly. This is the nursery. I'm upstairs. I have to get down. (*Pause*) The fire is coming from the stairway. I can't get down! It's getting closer.

SUSANNA: (*Screams. As the spotlight falls on Susanna, downstage right, we see her frantically shaking her husband, Samuel, who is sitting reading. Fire lighting focuses above them; crackling is heard.*) Closer! Don't you hear me, Samuel! I said the fire is getting closer. It's not just at the back. The whole house is ablaze.

SAMUEL: Fire? House? What are you talking about?

SUSANNA: You've left the candle too close to the thatch again.

SAMUEL: (*Alarmed*) Susanna, my books are up there! The dissertation on Job. My life's work!

SUSANNA: You prattle about books and manuscripts. Just thank God that the children are out in the yard.

SAMUEL: (*Stands up, vaguely*) Children? (*Wanders to stage right*) Well now, I must get up there and save my books. But how? My manuscript! My precious manuscript!

SUSANNA: *(Grasps his arm and pulls him to stage left)* My poor sweet poet. The manuscript is lost. Your books are lost. All is gone. That fire cannot be quenched. Look how it blazes!

KATE: *(Runs on from left, screaming hysterically)* Johnny! Johnny! Johnny's up there!

SUSANNA: Calm yourself, Kate.

KATE: No, no, no!

SUSANNA: Yes, they're all safe. It's only the house.

KATE: He was sick. He was sick. I was to look after him. Johnny's up there, I tell you. He's up there in the fire!

SAMUEL: My God, you're right. The poor lad will have perished by now.

SUSANNA: Oh, no. No. *(Pauses as the truth sinks in)* Do something, Samuel.

SAMUEL: The time, alas, is past.

SUSANNA: Samuel, *do* something!

SAMUEL: We can do nothing. He would have perished long ago. *(Susanna breaks down in tears and Samuel takes her in his arms.)* Come, woman, let us commend the child's soul to God. *(They kneel)*

KATE: *(Runs out, left, screaming)* O my God! Somebody help me!

SAMUEL: *(Intones)* Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return thither.

SUSANNA: *(Looks up, pleadingly)* Samuel?

SAMUEL: *(Carries on without a break)* The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away—

SUSANNA: *(Shakes him)* Samuel!

SAMUEL: *(Oblivious, as Susanna goes on shaking him)* Blessed be the name of the Lord. Merciful God, into your hands we commend the soul of our child here departed.

SUSANNA: *(Desperately)* The child is dying!

SAMUEL: Graciously accept and receive him unto your eternal—

TYERMAN: *(Enters and calls from downstage, left)* Mr. Wesley! Mr. Wesley! Your son is safe.

SUSANNA: *(Gets up, runs to Tyerman, embraces him)* Safe? O thank God! *(She bursts into tears)*

**SAMUEL:** *(Still on knees)* How did the lad escape, Mr. Tyerman?

**TYERMAN:** The boy called for help, sir, and when no one came he dragged a chest to the window and broke the glass. I saw him in the window and got a friend to stand on my shoulders, and so we got him. We all tumbled to the ground as the roof timbers fell in. Don't cry, ma'am.

**SUSANNA:** My little brand plucked from the burning. *(Turns to face audience and speaks with great intensity)* I do intend to be more particularly careful of the soul of this child, than ever I have been; that I may instill into his mind the principles of true religion and virtues. Lord, give me grace to do it sincerely and prudently and bless my attempts with good success.

*(Susanna exits while Samuel wanders around peering hopelessly at the house until Tyerman takes him by the arm. Fire effects gradually die down, until at the end of the scene there is complete darkness except for a spotlight on Wesley who is lying on the bed with his eyes closed. He has removed the bandage and shawl.)*

**SAMUEL:** My books! My manuscript! It was a dissertation on the Book of Job, Tyerman. I had been eight full years a-writing it.

**TYERMAN:** What are you mumbling about, Mr. Wesley?

**SAMUEL:** My manuscript. It was all consumed in the fire. A terrible loss, sir, terrible. *(Samuel exits, left, weeping)*

**TYERMAN:** *(Looks after him and then shakes his head)* That poor child! *(Exits)*

## Blackout

## Scene II

*(After a short pause, the light spotlights Wesley. Suddenly shouting is heard from the back of the theater. The lights come on as three drunken young men come down the aisle. Wesley gets out of bed to confront them. He is a vigorous young man in this scene.)*

**MANNERS:** Hey, Wesley! Halloo!

**FITZROY:** Close your prayer book!

- MANNERS:** No more hymn singing, old boy!
- FAIRACRES:** Bible bigot! We want a word with you!
- JOHN WESLEY:** (*Standing up*) I have not the honor of your acquaintance, gentlemen. What can I do for you?
- FITZROY:** (*Mimics him*) What can you do for us? You can give us your room, sir. We do not like your company.
- MANNERS:** The University of Oxford, sir, is a place for gentlemen, not for your damned psalm-singing, low-bred hypocrites. We do not like you, Mr. Wesley. (*Goes over to chair, downstage left, turns it around and strides it*)
- FAIRACRES:** (*Interrupts*) Why, here's Tom Fitzroy, sir, as good a man as ever drank his three bottles of claret after dinner.
- MANNERS:** That's for sure.
- FAIRACRES:** And here's the middle of hunting season, and poor Tom needs his sleep, and what must you do but wake him at five in the morning with your damned, whining, methody hymn singing and your damned impious praying. (*Pushes Wesley back onto bed*)
- FITZROY:** And your damned enthusiasts in your Holy Club or whatever you call yourselves.
- JOHN WESLEY:** (*Standing up again and speaking very stiffly*) We do not call ourselves anything. We seek only to ensure our own salvation by prayer and good deeds. Would you forbid a man the practice of religion?
- MANNERS:** Do you say we attack religion, sir? Religion is all very well. But it's coming to a pretty pass when it interferes with a man's private life.
- FITZROY:** (*Hand on Manners' shoulder and bellowing into his ear, mimics a donnish manner*) Are you of the opinion, my learned friend, that the Deity wishes to have Mr. Wesley's friends whining Psalms in his ear three times a day? (*Manners reacts with pained expression.*)
- FAIRACRES:** (*Copying his manner*) Are you of the opinion, Tom, that Mr. Wesley and his Puritan friends are going to save us from our sins?
- (*During this exchange Manners has been rocking to and fro on his chair as if it were a horse he was riding.*)
- FITZROY:** (*Pushing Manners off the chair*) No more fox hunting in the University, Mr. Manners.
- FAIRACRES:** No more bearbaiting.

**MANNERS:** (*Getting up, giggling unsteadily*) No more drinking.

**FITZROY:** Mr. Wesley's Holy Club doesn't like it!

**FAIRACRES:** (*Pushing Wesley back onto bed again*) Mr. Wesley's Holy Club can go to hell.

(*Charles Wesley and Benjamin Ingham enter, down-stage left, and cross over to stage right where they stand near Wesley at the bedside. They are plainly dressed in black, with unpowdered hair, and carry Bibles. Fairacres, Fitzroy, and Manners stare disdainfully at them, nudge one another, and burst into loud laughter.*)

**MANNERS:** Look at them!

**FITZROY:** Bigots!

**FAIRACRES:** Enthusiasts!

**MANNERS:** (*Stepping forward with fists up*) Teach them a lesson?

**FITZROY:** (*Holding him back, speaking contemptuously*) They won't fight.

**FAIRACRES:** Not a gentleman among them.

(*They turn and leave, right, throwing over their shoulders such abusive remarks as "Religious fanatics," "Bible bigots." Just when it appears they have left, Fitzroy whips around, picks up a chair, stage right, and waves it menacingly in the air. Ingham and Charles Wesley instinctively recoil.*)

**FITZROY:** Methodists—cut your liver out!

(*The three men now exit the way they came, their arms around one another, laughing and slapping one another on the back.*)

**MANNERS:** Come on, I want a drink!

**FAIRACRES:** There's a dozen of claret in my rooms.

**FITZROY:** Tally-ho!

**CHARLES WESLEY:** More of Satan's disciples, John?

**JOHN WESLEY:** Yes. They call us the Holy Club, Bible bigots, any name they can think of.

**INGHAM:** The other day I heard that fellow Fairacres call us Methodists. It seems he dislikes our habit of rising methodically at five.

**JOHN WESLEY:** (*Smiling*) I know.

**INGHAM:** Well, that's a better name than bigot or Bible moth. Why not call ourselves the Oxford Methodists?

JOHN WESLEY: *(Sits up, his legs over the side of the bed)* Very well. But I hardly care what name our enemies here call us. Charles, I have just come back from London. I've been invited to go to Georgia to convert the Indians of America!

CHARLES WESLEY: John, this is the Lord's doing. I must go with you.

INGHAM: We must all go. Will you two take me along?

JOHN WESLEY: Of course, Benjamin. God would not have you stay behind in this corrupt country.

CHARLES WESLEY: Think of it, John! To be working among those simple, grateful savages.

INGHAM: To leave these drunken, pleasure-loving Englishmen to sink in the mud of their own corruption.

JOHN WESLEY: We will create a new society, a people for God fashioned after holiness and purity. Charles, Benjamin, go now. Make inquiries.

CHARLES WESLEY: Are you sure, Benjamin?

INGHAM: Yes, this is the most exciting venture of my life.

JOHN WESLEY: *(Calling after them)* Go quickly. Three passages to America.

*(Charles Wesley and Ingham quickly exit, right, gesticulating excitedly. Lighting fades to dimness but not to complete darkness. Wesley lies down, speaks enthusiastically.)*

JOHN WESLEY: America! *(Now quietly but with great intensity)* America.

### Blackout

*(The solo instrument is heard softly playing a few bars of "Take Time to Be Holy" [tune: Holiness].)*

### Scene III

JOHN WESLEY: Charles! Where are you, Charles?

*(As the lights rise, Sophy Hopkey enters upstage left and stands by the bed. Lighting should suggest daylight and water shadows.)*

JOHN WESLEY: Where is my brother? *(Pleasantly surprised)* Why, Miss Sophy! Sophy Hopkey.

SOPHY: You were dreaming, Mr. Wesley. You called out in

your sleep. Your brother is still in Savannah. Do you not recall? We are going back there now. (Wesley *looks puzzled*) You came to see the governor in Frederica. He asked you to take me back upriver to my uncle's home. (Wesley *still looks puzzled, rubs his eyes, wakes up a little more, sits up, and moves cautiously to the end of the bed where he sits down.*)

JOHN WESLEY: The governor? Oh, yes, Oglethorpe. He wants us to minister to the colonists in Savannah until the Indians decide—

SOPHY: Mr. Oglethorpe told us the Indians didn't want you, Mr. Wesley.

JOHN WESLEY: Oh, no, that is not the case. I went to the chief myself. They said they need time to decide whether they will let us go among them.

SOPHY: (*Sits beside Wesley*) Sir? I'm glad the Indians don't want you. You and your brother can stay in Savannah with us now. I shall like that.

JOHN WESLEY: Do you know, Miss Sophy, I must be drowsy still. I thought I was—somewhere else—I had quite forgotten I was in a boat on the river.

SOPHY: You *were* asleep, sir. I do think you overtax yourself in your work. You've been sleeping ail afternoon.

JOHN WESLEY: Oh, no! I had no business sleeping at all this afternoon. I should have been pursuing my religious studies and sermon writing and—

SOPHY: You're too strict with yourself, Mr. Wesley. Mr. Oglethorpe told you so.

JOHN WESLEY: (*Stands, speaking stiffly*) Ma'am, Mr. Oglethorpe may be the governor of this colony, but his opinions on religion can be no rule for me.

(*Sophy stretches out a hand to John and pulls him back to sit beside her at the foot of the bed.*)

SOPHY: Oh, hush, Mr. Wesley. The sky is turning pink. The sun is setting. Look! Look how beautiful it is.

(*Wesley looks at her while she gazes at the sunset. Finally she turns round and catches him looking at her. Embarrassed, he quickly looks up at the sunset.*)

JOHN WESLEY: Yes. It is rather peaceful, isn't it? (*Sophy suddenly starts crying*) Don't distress yourself, child. What is it?

SOPHY: (*She stands up, moves away with her back to him*) I was only wishing it were half as peaceful in my aunt's house.

JOHN WESLEY: (*Standing*) Your aunt? Is she unkind to you?

- SOPHY: (Still with her back to Wesley) No—no—only there is always a crowd, and—you see, Mr. Wesley, the colonists work very hard. So in the evenings, there is nothing but noise, and rum, and— (Turns to Wesley) My parents died, so it was my aunt's duty to take me in, and I should be grateful.
- JOHN WESLEY: Poor child! (Reaches out his hand and draws her to sit down beside him, and absentmindedly keeps hold of her hand) Perhaps you could spend some time with—with my brother and myself. (Drops her hand) We plan to start a study class for the women in the colony. Are you confirmed?
- SOPHY: I don't think so. I go to church every week, and I say my prayers every night.
- JOHN WESLEY: Is that all?
- SOPHY: All, sir?
- JOHN WESLEY: Oh, Sophy, I could teach you so much! You would be an apt student, I am certain of it. You must come to me. We could study every morning, before breakfast. Could you be up and about so early? For I shall be busy, you know, the rest of the day.
- SOPHY: Oh, yes, Mr. Wesley, I should like that.
- JOHN WESLEY: Would your aunt and uncle permit it?
- SOPHY: Well, I fear my aunt thinks you're overstrict with the colonists. But my uncle likes you. He likes—
- JOHN WESLEY: (Breaks in) Overstrict? Do you mean overzealous?
- SOPHY: I don't know, sir. But many of the people don't like being made to go to church so often. And my aunt says you and your brother never smile.
- JOHN WESLEY: (Stands) But we have services only four times a day. The Apostle says, "Pray without ceasing." (To himself) And I cannot. (Pause) Oh, Sophy, I'm suddenly very tired. (Wesley, indeed weary, goes to the bed and takes book from bedside table.) Will you read to me some more?
- SOPHY: This book?
- JOHN WESLEY: Yes. That's the one.
- (Sophy smiles at him. He smiles back and closes his eyes. She begins reading, still seated and facing audience.)
- SOPHY: "O faithful soul, make ready thy heart for this bridegroom, that he may vouchsafe to come unto thee and dwell within thee! . . .

"Give, therefore, admittance unto Christ, and deny entrance to all others.

"When thou hast Christ thou art rich, and he will suffice thee."

JOHN WESLEY: Miss Sophy!

SOPHY: Yes?

JOHN WESLEY: I think we shall be very happy in Savannah after all. *(They smile at each other. Sophy now continues reading but becomes increasingly dismayed as the sense of the words dawns on her.)*

SOPHY: "Never desire to be inordinately loved, nor give inordinate love to any human creature, for that belongeth only unto God. Do not long for any one to be occupied with thee in their heart, and do not thou thyself be occupied with desire. . . . Be not familiar with any woman; but in general commend all good women to God."

*(Wesley has fallen asleep. Sophy now looks around, realizes that he is asleep, closes the book, and quietly walks away.)*

#### Scene IV

*(Shots ring out. Wesley sits bolt upright.)*

JOHN WESLEY: Dr. Hawkins! Dr. Hawkins! Is that you?

*(Hawkins appears, downstage left, with gun slung over his shoulder.)*

HAWKINS: Eh? Is that the parson calling?

JOHN WESLEY: I say, was that you filling the air with gunshot?

HAWKINS: The answer's plain, but why I needs must account to you, parson, is another thing. James Oglethorpe is the governor of this colony.

JOHN WESLEY: That may be so. But God is its Lord. In his holy name I ask, do you consider Sunday a proper day for sporting?

HAWKINS: What other day can there be! Oglethorpe works the men twelve to fourteen hours.

JOHN WESLEY: Sunday is the Lord's Sabbath. You know that.

HAWKINS: Yes, and you, sir, know that the dry beef is beginning to turn our stomachs. Would you have us ignore the game that roams so plentifully in the woods?

*(Benjamin Ingham and Charles Wesley appear, downstage right.)*

- INGHAM: Excuses, Dr. Hawkins, excuses! Mr. Wesley is right. It is the Lord's Day and ought to be spent in his service.
- CHARLES WESLEY: Yes, you ought not to be shooting or walking up and down in the woods.
- HAWKINS: (*Crossing to him threateningly; Charles steps back*) Who gave you the right, you young upstart, to stick your long nose into our affairs?
- JOHN WESLEY: We have the right as ordained ministers of the Church of England to admonish the people.
- HAWKINS: (*Wheeling and speaking now to John*) Well, parson, to be perfectly frank with you, the people here like nothing you do. Ordained or not!
- JOHN WESLEY: You speak, sir, as one who has already removed himself from the precincts of Holy Church.
- HAWKINS: Not so! We are Protestants, all of us. But as for you, we cannot tell *what* religion you are. We have never heard of such religion before.
- CHARLES WESLEY: Be off with you, doctor. Impiety becomes not a man of your station. Though you be the only surgeon in all of Savannah we shall not hesitate to report you henceforth. Be warned, sir!
- HAWKINS: Be warned yourself! There are new laws in America. As you shall shortly discover.  
(*Hawkins storms out, downstage right.*)
- CHARLES WESLEY: I rejoice, brother, in your vindication of the Lord's Day. I wonder whether we have been sufficiently admonishing our people as to the heinousness of their sins.
- JOHN WESLEY: I have been wondering, too, Charles. It is true, indeed, that the more ignorant and unteachable the parishioner, the more rigorous religious discipline must be.
- INGHAM: But it is hard to find the time for serious admonitions when the day is already so strictly divided. Between morning prayer, private prayers, reading for the women, preaching, and catechizing . . . I confess my spirit begins to flag. Then there are vespers and evening prayer, daily study, baptizing—
- JOHN WESLEY: Courage, Benjamin! Hast thou not waited upon the Lord? He shall renew your strength. He shall cause you to mount up with wings as eagles, to run and not be weary. (*Ingham looks depressed*) Charles, speak to our friend. I shall join you both for vespers later.

CHARLES WESLEY: I shall do as you say, brother. But even I will allow that impious fellows such as Hawkins are a discouragement. Would you not agree that such manners are unpromising? So ignorant! So churlish!

JOHN WESLEY: I do. I fear, indeed, that our love and kindness will shortly be repaid by hatred and ill will. Yet what more can we do than rebuke the ungodly by our exhortation and example? Remember, in all of this we have the Lord's blessing that he who endures to the end shall be saved. God be with you, friends. I must needs be alone for a while before Miss Sophy arrives for her French lesson.

*(Charles and Benjamin turn to leave and then stop in their tracks.)*

CHARLES WESLEY: Miss Sophy Hopkey? Did she not come for her French lesson this morning?

JOHN WESLEY: No. That was catechism.

CHARLES WESLEY: But I was sure she was here. I heard you talking French to her, John.

JOHN WESLEY: *(Pause)* No. That was yesterday.

CHARLES WESLEY: Yesterday? The girl has French lessons with you every day now, John?

JOHN WESLEY: No. That was catechism.

CHARLES WESLEY: John. Are you thinking of marrying the girl?

JOHN WESLEY: Marrying? I? Whatever are you thinking of?

CHARLES WESLEY: You're spending more time with her than you do with us.

INGHAM: Our reputation, John.

JOHN WESLEY: How dare you! Am I to be slandered because Miss Sophy is one of the few people who responds to my teaching! *(With righteous indignation)* I am a minister of God. She's only a child. Now please leave me. I must write in my journal.

*(Charles and Benjamin exit, right. The lights dim, and, in the half-glow, a spotlight falls on Wesley as he writes in his journal, speaking the words aloud.)*

JOHN WESLEY: In the name of God I resolve I shall be, one, more watchful, before and in prayer; two, more thankful in eating; three, more sincere in prayer *(Pause)* and more diligent as well. Four, I resolve to look into no book but the Bible till Christmas; five, I resolve to speak no untended or unintended word.

*(Puts journal aside and reclines. When Wesley speaks again his eyes are closed and his voice breaks with emotion.)*

JOHN WESLEY: I stand in jeopardy every hour. Lord Jesus, help me! Her ways so guileless, her heart so tender and patient, her spirit so eager for instruction. Sophy, Sophy, I pray that I shall not know you after the flesh! *(Reaches for journal and pen, has difficulty opening it, finally finds his place and writes)* Six, in the name of God I resolve not to touch even her clothes by choice and to think not of her if I can.

## Blackout

## Scene V

*(Wesley puts journal down, gives sigh of relief, falls back on the bed, only to be brought bolt upright again by shouts and the noise of a struggle. The following lines are spoken in darkness, downstage left.)*

CONSTABLE: Hawkins, come with me.

HAWKINS: What! Are you arresting me?

CONSTABLE: I am taking you into custody.  
*(Spotlight picks them up.)*

HAWKINS: How dare you lay hands on me!

CONSTABLE: Come on! You come with me!

HAWKINS: Get away! I'll go straight to Oglethorpe on this matter. You can't take me in. I'm no common fellow.

CONSTABLE: A complaint has been lodged, sir. We have to act on information received.

HAWKINS: Why, who was that?

*(Light switches immediately from Hawkins to Wesley. Beata Hawkins, who has gone straight for Wesley, is scratching and clawing at his face while he valiantly tries to fend her off.)*

BEATA: You! You meddling little parson! Informing on us! You hypocrite. You—oh, I could tear you limb from limb. I could shoot you. *(Wesley manages to grab her hands and she collapses into tears)* Thanks to you, John Wesley, my poor husband is in jail.

JOHN WESLEY: *(Stiffly)* I do regret what has happened, Mrs. Hawkins. But your husband broke the law. I forgive you for this unseemly outburst. I have nothing but pity for you.

**BEATA:** (*Gets up*) Pity yourself! In the whole of Georgia you have no friends. Even your long-nosed brother and Ingham got tired of your sanctimonious ways. I heard it myself. They took ship for England. So what have you to show for your ministry here?

**JOHN WESLEY:** Come, come, Mrs. Hawkins. You know of my ministry yourself. Why, only recently your good friend Ann Welch was healed of her sickness through God's power.

**BEATA:** Oh, you conceited oaf! Through Mr. Wesley's power, is what you mean. You think you made a saint of Ann Welch? You think you healed her by giving her communion?

**JOHN WESLEY:** No, no. I do not say it's my doing. The glory is God's, not ours.

**BEATA:** (*Mimics him*) The glory is God's not ours. Wake up parson! Open your eyes. That trollop Ann Welch! Comes to your communion with that saintly smile on her face. The girl's bedding with James Oglethorpe! (*Wesley gazes at her appalled*) You seem surprised! Why, the whole colony knows it. So much for your shining example of holiness. So much for your mission work, John Wesley. Even the savages don't want you. Whatever made you feel we did?

(*She storms out, downstage left. The lights dim. Blackout. In the darkness a drum is heard, at first very gently. The drum beat becomes stronger, and stronger, but suddenly ceases. As the lights go up, Wesley is seen, pen in hand, writing a letter.*)

**JOHN WESLEY:** My dear Charles,  
Since you went away, the storm clouds we spoke of have gathered and indeed burst upon my head. Dr. Hawkins is released from jail and vows he will have me run out of the colony for a meddling Papist, an interfering Non-conformist, and I know not what besides. His wife has been abusing me with much violence and declares that I should cease meddling with their affairs and look to my own, since poor Ann Welch, that I received to the Lord's Table, is Oglethorpe's mistress.

I taxed Mrs. Welch with this, and she did not deny it but with equally violent language and much abuse of me accused Mrs. Hawkins herself of the same offense. And so it is said on all sides. When I went to Oglethorpe and pressed him to be open with me as to this horrible charge, he did not even raise his eyes from the papers he was working on but ordered me

to return to my business which, he says, is the reading of prayers and not the overseeing of his private concerns.

Oh, Charles, my soul is sick! If you knew how terrible these people seem now to me, the women as much as the men, how rude and boorish, how deceitful and corrupt. I pity them from my heart, yet there are few for whom I can feel that affection a priest should have toward his people. When I try to pray my heart sinks under the weight of horror and sadness. Pity me, my dear brother, and pray for me. I am so utterly alone. *(Wesley looks up and is startled to find Sophy, who has entered quietly, left, standing by his side. He immediately puts down his letter and pen.)* Miss Sophy! I didn't notice you enter. How long have you been standing there?

SOPHY: Not long, Mr. Wesley.

JOHN WESLEY: You know I'm always glad to see you. But I thought your French lesson was tomorrow.

SOPHY: Please, sir, I wanted to speak to you on a subject of a more delicate nature.

JOHN WESLEY: Dear child! Has your uncle been making it hard for you at home again?

SOPHY: He has, Mr. Wesley, though that only partially explains my disquiet.

JOHN WESLEY: You know you may confide in me. What troubles you so?

SOPHY: *(Cries softly)* I don't know, Mr. Wesley. I just don't know where to turn. I know I can't bear to live with my aunt and uncle any longer. And this morning I received a letter from Tommy Mellichamp. He's out of jail now, you know. He wants me to come to him.

JOHN WESLEY: Well, is that your wish?

SOPHY: Oh, no, thank God. I've entirely conquered that inclination.

JOHN WESLEY: I hear Mr. Williamson pays his addresses to you.

SOPHY: *(Taken aback)* Mr. Wesley, what did you say?

JOHN WESLEY: I hear Mr. Williamson pays his addresses to you. *(Pause)* Well, is it true?

*(Sophy sits on chair, downstage, left, during pause.)*

SOPHY: If it were not true I would have told you.

JOHN WESLEY: How do you like him?

**SOPHY:** It's the same as with Tommy. I have no special inclination for him.

**JOHN WESLEY:** Miss Sophy, if you deceive me I shall scarce ever believe anyone again.

**SOPHY:** You will never have that reason for distrusting anyone. I shall never deceive you.

**JOHN WESLEY:** Well then, Miss Sophy, your dilemma is this. Your aunt and uncle do not behave in such a way as to make your lodgings pleasant or comfortable. They urge you to marry. But you cannot take Mr. Williamson or Mr. Mellichamp. And you are by far too young and defenseless to live alone. What are you going to do then, my child?

**SOPHY:** (*Standing*) That is why I came to you, Mr. Wesley.

**JOHN WESLEY:** You have nowhere to turn but me? (*Sophy shakes her head. Long pause. Suddenly Wesley holds out his hands to her.*) Miss Sophy, I want you to know that I should think myself happy if I were to spend my life with you. (*Pause, while Sophy walks slowly over to him. Wesley takes her hands in his. Pause again. Suddenly Wesley frees his hands and holds them up in protest.*) But I am resolved, as you know, never to marry, but to consecrate my life to Christ and to him alone.

**SOPHY:** (*Hurt but resigned*) I know, sir, it's best for the clergy not to be encumbered with worldly cares. It is best for me, too, to live single. (*Crying quietly*) But it is so hard. They press me so and—

**MRS. CAUSTON:** (*Entering downstage right*) There you are, wicked child! Come with me before I take the rod and strip you bare.

**SOPHY:** (*Moves defiantly to stage center*) No! I shan't live in your home any more. The shocks that I meet there are more than I can stand. (*Cries even harder*)

**MRS. CAUSTON:** What, you won't live in my home! Grown too fine for it, have you? Well, miss, where will you live then?

**SOPHY:** I—I don't know.

**MRS. CAUSTON:** Running around chasing the priest all over Savannah when you should be looking for a husband.

**SOPHY:** No!

**MRS. CAUSTON:** Then come home, silly wench.

**JOHN WESLEY:** Come, Mrs. Causton, there's no need to bully the girl. Miss Sophy is welcome to come to my house or to have anything that I have.

MRS. CAUSTON: (*Abruptly sweetness and light*) Well now, Mr. Wesley, I never thought to hear a formal proposal from the likes of you.

JOHN WESLEY: (*Stiffly*) I beg your pardon!

MRS. CAUSTON: A formal proposal. Oh, can't you see, Sophy, he won't marry you. (*Suddenly reverting to sympathy*) Come on, you poor child. I'm taking you home. (*Puts an arm around Sophy and leads her offstage, right. Looking back over her shoulder, viciously*) The only thing likely to get into bed with him is a prayer book.

(*Lights dim, spotlight on Wesley.*)

JOHN WESLEY: O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death! Her words, her eyes, her air, her every motion and gesture, full of such softness and sweetness. O Sophy, what might be the consequences if I but touch your hand! (*Pause*) And yet I would touch you. Sophy Wesley, John's wife. John's partner and helpmate. Our love blessed and hallowed. Could I have been misled? Is this God's will, after all? Or is the devil setting snares for my soul? Oh, I must not see her again. I cannot take fire into my bosom and not be burned. But I must have time to consider. I will explain to her. Yes, I will go to her and explain my dilemma. Oh, I must see her again!

(*Second spotlight on Mrs. Causton.*)

MRS. CAUSTON: Sir! Sir!

JOHN WESLEY: Mrs. Causton? What is the matter now, madam?

MRS. CAUSTON: (*Very sweetly*) Nothing the matter, Mr. Wesley. No complaints at all. In fact, Mr. Causton and I are greatly obliged to you for the pains you have taken in educating our dear niece. Sophy is much obliged too. She asked me herself, she did, to ask you to publish the banns of marriage between her and Mr. Williamson. Shall I tell her that you'll be calling them for the first time this Sunday? (*Silence. John is stunned, sickened.*) Sir, you don't seem well pleased. Have you some objection?

JOHN WESLEY: Madam, I don't seem to be awake.

MRS. CAUSTON: I assure you this is no dream, Mr. Wesley. They agreed on it last night, they did. After we got back home. And then Mr. Williamson asked me and Mr. Causton for our consent, which we gave him. But if you have any objection, pray speak. Speak to the girl yourself. Go to her. She will be glad to hear anything Mr. Wesley might say.

JOHN WESLEY: No, madam, if Miss Sophy is engaged, I have nothing to say. It will not signify for me to see her any more.  
(Mrs. Causton *shrugs and exits*. *Lights dim*. *Spotlight on Wesley*)

JOHN WESLEY: From the beginning of my life to this hour I have never known a day such as this. O God, why did you loose my inordinate affection! Why did you allow such poison to drink up my spirit! O Sophy, why did I not simply take you and make you mine. 'Tis hard to describe the tumult and passion that I now feel: fear of your approaching misery; grief for my own loss; love shooting through all the recesses of my soul, and sharpening every thought and passion. O Sophy, why did I not take you and make you mine! (*Closes his eyes*)

(*A solo instrument is heard playing "And Can It Be That I Should Gain" [tune: Fillmore]. Spot dims.*)

## Blackout

## Scene VI

(*Lighting returns to normal as Constable enters beating on a small drum. Men and women, in Sunday clothing and with prayer books, enter and assemble round bed, chat, find places in prayer books. Wesley picks up stole and puts it on. Sophy and William Williamson now walk in together. Constable stops beating drum. Congregation freezes.*)

JOHN WESLEY: Miss Sophy! I have not seen you for two weeks now. Will you not speak to me? Have you given any more thought to—

SOPHY: I am married, Mr. Wesley.

JOHN WESLEY: Married? What do you mean? I know you are not married. There is none but I who could perform the ceremony, and I— O God, what hideous thing is this?

SOPHY: I am married, Mr. Wesley.

JOHN WESLEY: No! Sophy, you never lied to me in your life. Are you tormenting me now? Last time we talked, I thought your sentiments—

SOPHY: We talked? You talked! You talked, and talked, and all you could say was that I should not marry. What could I say? What could I do? How long could I go on?

JOHN WESLEY: Sophy! Oh, no! Tell me this is untrue! Tell me I have not lost you!

SOPHY:

I am married, John.

*(Wesley now picks up prayer book and tries distractedly to find his place in it. Congregation unfreezes, as more men and women, including Mrs. Causton and Mrs. Hawkins, enter. Drum beats again until Mrs. Causton and Mrs. Hawkins are in position, downstage left. Drum stops. Congregation freezes again. Spotlight picks up Mrs. Hawkins and Mrs. Causton, and Wesley who is clearly appalled by what he is hearing, though the rest of the congregation is oblivious.)*

MRS. HAWKINS:

And so your niece is wed, Mrs. Causton?

MRS. CAUSTON:

She is, Mrs. Hawkins, these two weeks past.

MRS. HAWKINS:

Well, they might have given us the chance to dance at their wedding. It's little enough pleasure we get here. But it wasn't here she was married, was it?

MRS. CAUSTON:

It was not, my dear. For, says she, with all the spite the parson was taking at her about it, they'd best not be married by him. So they just took boat down to Purrysburgh and had it done quietly there.

MRS. HAWKINS:

Well, you are well rid of her, are you not?

MRS. CAUSTON:

I'm not sure I understand you, Mrs. Hawkins.

MRS. HAWKINS:

Oh, come now. My ears aren't plugged. I was told the girl first made a public show of herself. Practically threw herself onto the parson. Offered to move in with him and share his bed and everything.

MRS. CAUSTON:

Mrs. Hawkins! I'll have you know our dear Sophy is no trollop. It was *him* that offered his bed to her. I heard it with my own ears, I did.

MRS. HAWKINS:

Now, Mrs. Causton, don't bend the truth.

MRS. CAUSTON:

It's no lie, I tell you! I heard him. I grabbed Sophy and pulled her away from him as fast as I could. Imagine talking to a decent young girl like that! A parson, if you will!

MRS. HAWKINS:

Well! And we thought he was only a pious hypocrite. So the man is a lecher as well, is he?

*(The congregation unfreezes. The drum begins beating loudly, then more softly, muffled in the background as Wesley begins speaking. Mrs. Causton and Mrs. Hawkins join the rest of the congregation. All are standing.)*

JOHN WESLEY:

*(Sitting on the side of the bed and speaking in a very agitated manner)* "Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your

neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways: Draw near with faith, and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort, and make your humble confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon your knees."

CONGREGATION:

*(The people kneel and recite in unison)* "Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all men: We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed. . . . We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings: The remembrance of them is grievous unto us. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father."

JOHN WESLEY:

"Draw near with faith and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort."

*(In complete silence, parishioners come forward, one by one, kneel, and receive the chalice from Wesley's hands. When Sophy's turn comes, he starts to hand her the chalice then withdraws it at the last moment.)*

JOHN WESLEY:

No! Not you! *(Pause)* You have deceived me. *(Pause)* When you have repented of your deceitfulness *(Sarcastically)*, Mrs. Williamson, you may receive the mysteries of God.

*(Silence again. Sophy stands up, looks around in great bewilderment, and then tearfully collapses into her husband's arms. Pandemonium breaks out, the parishioners rise and shake their fists at Wesley who is soon lying flat, totally hidden by the excited, noisy, hostile crowd. Lighting swings in nightmare fashion, from light to dark and back again—something of a strobe effect.)*

WILLIAMSON:

You have slandered my wife, sir!

CONGREGATION:

Slander!  
Bring him to trial!  
Throw him out!  
Meddling Papist! Womanizer!  
The governor shall hear of this! Dog in the manger!  
Indict him! The poor girl! Lecher!  
What kind of priest is he! He put our doctor in jail!  
We don't want him! Leave the colony!  
We would do better with no parson than this one!  
Won't let us hunt, won't let us shoot!  
Won't baptize our children!  
Slander! Slander!

*(The noise rises to a terrific crescendo, with the shouts of*

*"slander!" and the drum beat predominating. Then there is a sudden blackout followed by absolute silence. Crowd exits. During the period of darkness Wesley removes stole.)*

## Scene VII

*(Normal lighting. Charles Wesley enters and goes to the bed. Peter Böhler enters but remains upstage in the background. John Wesley is lying absolutely flat on the bed.)*

- CHARLES WESLEY: *(Gently, obviously worried)* Wake up, brother!
- JOHN WESLEY: What time is it?
- CHARLES WESLEY: Poor John. You've never tarried so late in your life. It must have been that stormtossed sea—
- JOHN WESLEY: Sea—! Storm—! Are we yet in danger?
- CHARLES WESLEY: What! Has your memory gone as well as your good spirits?
- JOHN WESLEY: O brother, please stay with me.
- CHARLES WESLEY: Listen to me. You're not on the sea any longer. You've been back in London with me for three whole weeks. That nightmare in Georgia is over. It's finished, John. You're safe home now.
- JOHN WESLEY: It's not finished! Those faces pursue me still. They leer and grin and laugh. My—my people. My flock. And I left them. I left my sheep without a shepherd.
- CHARLES WESLEY: You were never less than honorable, brother.
- JOHN WESLEY: No, Charles. I ran away in the dead of night. Three of the worst characters in the colony took me downriver. I have forsaken them all, and now God has forsaken me.
- CHARLES WESLEY: John, he has not forsaken us. Look who he has brought us. *(Böhler steps forward)*
- JOHN WESLEY: Forgive me, sir. My mind is unaccountably cloudy these days. Are you another friend whose name I have foolishly forgotten?
- CHARLES WESLEY: No, you've never met this man before. I've only known him myself a fortnight and yet already—John, God has used him to save my soul!
- BÖHLER: *(Reaching forth his hand)* Greetings, brother. My name is Peter Böhler. Your brother tells me you are afflicted with a great spiritual malaise.

**JOHN WESLEY:** (*Stiffly*) Sir, I know nothing of any such affliction. I have just returned from Georgia where we were serving the cause of God most diligently.

**CHARLES WESLEY:** No need to boast, John. Mr. Böhler knows all about our endeavors.

**JOHN WESLEY:** Then why should he think I am afflicted? I am no more afflicted than—

**BÖHLER:** Than the Pharisees?

**JOHN WESLEY:** (*Turning to Charles*) How can you let this man say such things? I thought you were my brother.

**CHARLES WESLEY:** I am, John. That's why I'm pressing you so. Can't you see? All the time we were in Georgia, and even before, we strove mightily unto righteousness. But we did not know the Savior.

**JOHN WESLEY:** Not so. We proclaimed his gospel tirelessly.

**CHARLES WESLEY:** Yes, but no man loved us.

**JOHN WESLEY:** The offense of the gospel.

**CHARLES WESLEY:** No, dear brother. We were the offense. It was clear that we trusted, not in the gospel, but in our own strivings, our own holiness.

**JOHN WESLEY:** What? Has Mr. Böhler convinced you that holiness is of no import?

**CHARLES WESLEY:** You talk to him, Peter.

**BÖHLER:** We breathe not a word against holiness, John. But it is the effect of salvation, not its cause.

**JOHN WESLEY:** (*Wearily*) You sectarians! You speak of faith as though a man believes, and has nothing more to do. I hear a call not to abandon duty but to take up the cross.

**BÖHLER:** How can you lead men to the cross when you do not know Christ yourself?

**JOHN WESLEY:** Who are you to say that I do not know my Lord?

**BÖHLER:** Did I not hear you say as I came in, God has forsaken me? (*Pause, then compassionately*) John Wesley, you will know your Lord. You will know him as the One who made an end of your sin and guilt by taking it all upon himself. The time will come. You will indeed bring men and women to Christ, and not tempt them to trust in their own righteousness.

**JOHN WESLEY:** I cannot refute you. I'm tired now. My mind is broken down. But I don't—

SUSAN: I've known John Wesley from when he began field preaching. He has always pitied these children from the back streets. They have nothing to do, he says.

MARY: They have plenty to do, picking pockets and stealing.

DAN: They can work, can't they? Like the rest of us!

EDWARD: I heard this man Wesley was one of yon Quakers.

DAN: I heard he was a Papist.

PHILIP: England's had enough of these fire and brimstone Puritans.

EDWARD: Gloomy sour-faced killjoys!

CATHERINE: But Mr. Wesley's not like that at all!

PHILIP: What do you mean he's not? These evangelists are all the same. Heat up hell. More they do it the more the people come running.

HANNAH: No, no. Mr. Wesley doesn't frighten anybody. He tells you that God's good, that God loves you.

PHILIP: That's all?

HANNAH: Yes. That's all.

EDWARD: Then what are we doing here?

MARY: Wait and see. Oh, here comes somebody now!

JANE: Sit down you in front there. I can't see.

*(Two well-dressed, dour-looking Church of England clergymen enter. They are Dr. Bulkeley, a heavily built man, who is the parish priest of the area, and the Rev. Middleton, assistant to the bishop. Crowd hushes slightly.)*

EDWARD: Is that him?

JANE: That fellow? I thought you said he was a small man.

MARTHA: No, that's Dr. Bulkeley.

JANE: Who's Dr. Bulkeley?

MARTHA: Shuush. Don't you know? He's the parish priest at Wednesbury.

PHILIP: Hey, parson! I hear you get sixteen hundred pounds a year.

EDWARD: What do you do for it, parson? Hold all the ladies' hands?

DAN: Yeah, and squeeze their—

- PHILIP:** *(Mimics refined accent)* Now, now, gentlemen. None of that loose talk in the good parson's hearing.
- (Workers all burst into raucous laughter. Bulkeley swings around and singles out one of the younger members of the band.)*
- BULKELEY:** Hey you! *(Pointing to young Grace Plowman)* Yes, you! What is your name?
- GRACE:** Me, sir? Grace Plowman, sir.
- BULKELEY:** That's right. I know you. Your parents are my parishioners. What are you doing here?
- GRACE:** I came to hear John Wesley, sir.
- BULKELEY:** Nonsense! What do you want to hear field preaching for? Don't you go to church?
- GRACE:** I should like to, sir, but all your pews are rented.
- BULKELEY:** Well, you can stand, can't you? Or sit on the bench at the back?
- HANNAH:** But then she don't feel overmuch welcome.
- MARTHA:** *(To Hannah)* Everyone's welcome here.
- BULKELEY:** Those pews, young woman, are for the use of your betters. Good heavens, where is your Christian humility? Your sense of duty? *(To Middleton who nods approvingly)* Why, if everybody sat in church where they chose there would be anarchy. *(To Grace)* Anarchy, do you hear me? Who's your employer?
- GRACE:** I work in the mill, sir.
- BULKELEY:** Well, let me hear no more of such rebellious talk or I shall have to have a serious word with your master. Now, be off with you.
- GRACE:** Thank you, sir. But since I'm here now, I think I'll just hear what this new preacher has to say. Same as yourself, sir.
- HANNAH:** *(Quietly)* Yes, you stay, Grace.
- BULKELEY:** *(To Middleton)* Have you ever witnessed such insolence, Middleton? *(To Grace)* You hear me? I said be off with you. You're far too impressionable, my girl. *(To the others)* You, too, run along now.
- MARY:** Hey, parson, stop picking on the poor things.
- PHILIP:** *(Stumbles into Bulkeley, knocking him off balance)* Oh, I beg your pardon, parson. My hand slipped.
- MIDDLETON:** *(Very angry)* My good fellow, you are drunk.

- PHILIP:** I am neither good, sir, nor drunk. I'm very drunk.  
(*Laughter*)
- MIDDLETON:** Gin-soaked pigs!  
(*Someone in the crowd suddenly reaches up and splashes mud over Middleton's head. He and Bulkeley beat a hasty retreat amid whistling, booing, and catcalling. Meanwhile the band reassembles and begins playing, silencing the catcalls. Wesley now enters, accompanied by Charles.*)
- SUSAN:** He's here!
- WORKERS:** Let's hear him.  
Come on, Wesley!  
Little feller, ain't he?  
Come on, Wesley!  
Quiet, let him speak!  
(*The band stops with a flourish, a momentary hush falls, and Wesley begins to speak.*)
- JOHN WESLEY:** Good friends! Don't think I have come here to silence your laughter and stifle your merriment. I know how hard your life is. I've come to share the good news that God knows too. You rise and work and eat and sleep only to rise and toil again. You wish you had something better, but you know not where to find it.  
(*The workers up to this point have been less than quiet. Wesley now approaches them directly, addressing them individually*) Can you, or you, or you— (to Edward) What is your name?
- EDWARD:** Edward, sir.
- JOHN WESLEY:** Can you, Edward, or any of you here think you were made for the life you now lead? (*The people quieten down*) You cannot possibly think so. At least not unless you tread the Bible underfoot. For the oracles of God bear witness in every page, and our own hearts agree thereto, that you were made in the image of God, an incorruptible picture of the God of glory. (*Wesley kneels down in front of a group of younger people who are themselves kneeling*) And what are you even in your present wretched state? An everlasting spirit, going to God. For this end did he create you, to dwell with him above this perishable world, to know him, to love him, to do his will, and to enjoy him for ever and ever. (*Wesley stands up*) To this end you want to live. God has sent me here today to tell you that to this end you *may* live. God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very purpose he came down from heaven. He has shared your

misery. He has made the darkness of your days his own. He knows how you live. And now he calls you into the light of his own deathless glory. No man or woman here need live as a drunkard, a thief, a slave. You are all valued. You are all loved. You will all learn to love one another. *(Wesley moves forward, downstage center, and casts his eyes heavenward)* "Behold, behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." See "the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth"! *(Turning to some of the crowd)* He loveth thee. He gave himself for thee. O believe in the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved! "Go in peace, sin no more!"

MARY: *(Suddenly collapses in near-hysterical tears)* O God, forgive me! Forgive me! *(Wesley goes over to her, puts an arm around her)*

JOHN WESLEY: Go in peace, and the peace of Christ shall go with you.

EDWARD: I'll take care of her, Mr. Wesley.

JOHN WESLEY: Thank you, Edward.  
*(Edward leads Mary off, comforting her.)*

SUSAN: Mr. Wesley!

JOHN WESLEY: Oh, it's my old friend Susan Dell.

SUSAN: These are the people, sir, who were playing the music when you arrived.

JOHN WESLEY: So you started a band, did you, Susan? *(Turns to band)* Greetings friends! Oh, how your music stirred my soul. You know, my brother Charles here has written a number of new hymns.

CHARLES WESLEY: I've brought some copies of the newest one with me. Would you like to take them with you? Look at them with Mrs. Dell, and tomorrow morning we'll sing it together. My brother will be preaching here again.

MARY: Can I have a copy, too, sir?

CHARLES WESLEY: Of course you may. *(Produces hymn sheets from pocket and begins handing them out.)*

GRACE: Mrs. Dell! I'd like to speak to Mr. Wesley if possible.

JANE: Come on, Grace, you ain't thinking of turning religious on us, is you?

GRACE: *(Wheeling around to face Jane)* If knowing joy and life is religion, then maybe so. That man spoke to me.

BEN: *(Joining in)* Aw, but he don't even stomp and holler. He don't even scare people much with the badness of hell.

GRACE: But he told us, Ben, religion is not about hell.

SUSAN: *(Taking Grace by the arm, leads her over to Wesley)* Mr. Wesley, young Grace Plowman here wants to speak to you.

JOHN WESLEY: I'll be glad to speak to her.  
*(Wesley and Grace shake hands; Grace makes a slight curtsy. Some of the others leave quietly, band and women look at music, while a couple of workers hover around listening to Wesley talk to Grace Plowman.)*

GRACE: Mr. Wesley, your words struck home to me. I should very much like to know that God loves me and that my life has a meaning, a purpose.

JOHN WESLEY: Your life does have a purpose, Grace. By the way, you have a very beautiful name. The gospel is the message of God's grace for us all. God will make your name come true. You are going to bring that message to others.

GRACE: Me, sir? I don't see how I could— How do I know God wants me?

JOHN WESLEY: Because you are here. Your very presence here is the assurance that he does.

GRACE: I do feel at this moment that God is with me. But already I am afraid. What about tomorrow? Will I still feel it tomorrow?

JOHN WESLEY: Don't place your trust in your feelings. Feelings come and go. God remains. Put your trust in him and in the promises of his gospel. God has pledged himself to us in Christ. He won't go back on his word. But listen, you are to help me start a Bible class for the workers in this place. You can learn while you are teaching them. You will meet regularly and keep one another firm in the faith.

GRACE: I'd be greatly honored, sir. But I don't think I can.

JOHN WESLEY: Why not?

GRACE: Well, I wouldn't know how to do anything like that. I'm not lettered.

BEN: I'll help you, Grace.

DAN: Can I join too?

JOHN WESLEY: Well, Grace?

GRACE: *(After a moment of thought)* You can depend on me, Mr. Wesley.

JOHN WESLEY: Very well. Tomorrow morning we'll announce the formation of the first mission society in Wednesbury. But now I must take my leave.

SUSAN: Can you not stay with us for breakfast, Mr. Wesley?

JOHN WESLEY: Well, that is very kind of you. I thank you. But I must ride to Bristol today. The bishop has summoned me to answer to him for my field preaching here.

SUSAN: Why? What is there to answer for?

JOHN WESLEY: It seems that God himself is not allowed to save souls in Wednesbury parish unless he does it through Dr. Bulkeley. *(Laughter. All exit.)*

## Blackout

## Scene II

*(As the lights go up, the bishop is seen pacing back and forth. There is a knock at the door. The bishop is too preoccupied to notice. There is a second, louder knock.)*

BISHOP: *(Barking)* Yes! *(Horne, the bishop's chaplain, shy and timid, appears in doorway)* Well, Horne, is that fellow Wesley here?

HORNE: No, my Lord. But Dr. Bulkeley and Mr. Middleton are asking to see you.

BISHOP: Well, I can't see them now. You know that Wesley was sent for. He should be here any minute.

HORNE: They seem to feel it's urgent, my Lord.

BISHOP: *(Irascibly)* Oh, show them in. *(The two men, muddy and disheveled, stagger in. Middleton's head is bandaged.)* Good God! Dr. Bulkeley. *(Bishop goes over and inspects Middleton through quizzing glasses.)* Mr. Middleton, why are you in such a state? Have you got a bang on the head?

MIDDLETON: I am afraid so, my Lord.

BISHOP: Well, what happened? Where did you get it?

BULKELEY: *(Very somberly)* At Mr. Wesley's field preaching, my Lord. *(Bishop drops his quizzing glasses, turns away from Middleton, takes a few paces in silence, and then speaks to no one in particular.)*

BISHOP: Then it's true. The man is inciting the mobs to violence. *(Pause, then to Horne)* Horne, we must get a physician for Mr. Middleton at once.

- MIDDLETON:** Oh, no, my Lord. There is no need. I am willing to bear it. Truth to tell, it was Dr. Bulkeley who suffered the deeper injury. I should never wish to repeat the insults and blasphemies they heaped upon his innocent head. But, my Lord, you would have been proud of your servant. He suffered their mad indignities with Christlike forbearance.
- BULKELEY:** So did you, Mr. Middleton.
- BISHOP:** Gentlemen, words cannot express my sense of outrage that this should have happened to both of you. But Providence is at work here. I am expecting Wesley any minute. Together we shall confront him with the dastardly results of his fanaticism.
- (Middleton and Bulkeley exchange nervous glances.)
- BULKELEY:** Ah—I will be glad to stay, my Lord. But I do think poor Mr. Middleton here needs to retire. I fear he's modestly underestimated the extent of his physical impairment.
- BISHOP:** Well, well, it shall be as you choose. But it's a pity we can't bring Wesley face to face with this outrage!
- MIDDLETON:** I—I'd like to stay, my Lord. But I do feel rather faint.
- BISHOP:** No, no, you go and lie down then. Horne, take care of Mr. Middleton. Perhaps a physician should be summoned after all.
- HORNE:** Certainly, my Lord.
- MIDDLETON:** Your Grace, you are compassion itself. (*Bows and exits with Horne*)
- BISHOP:** I don't understand it, Dr. Bulkeley. Inciting the people this way. The man must be crazed.
- BULKELEY:** Let us be charitable, my Lord. Not crazed. Shall we say—misguided? I really don't think the unfortunate man is aware of the vile passions his preaching unleashes in these animals.
- BISHOP:** You are too magnanimous, doctor. The Methodist movement is dangerous. This deplorable incident has opened my eyes. I have brought Wesley here in the hope of reaching some compromise. But it's clear now the time has come to act. I am resolved upon it. We must stamp out this movement before the mob starts breaking our windows. (*Knock on door*) Now! Into battle, Bulkeley!
- (Bishop raises fist in warlike gesture. The door opens, and Horne and Wesley appear.)

- HORNE:** Mr. John Wesley requests an audience of my Lord Bishop.
- (Throughout this scene, Wesley's manner is consistently firm and dignified. Though deferential to the bishop and without a trace of arrogance, he is completely self-assured.)*
- JOHN WESLEY:** Not so, my Lord. I have presented myself before you at your Lordship's express requirement. I requested no audience.
- BISHOP:** Be seated, Mr. Wesley.
- (Horne promptly places a small straight-back chair in center of stage. Wesley sits and the bishop circles the chair in silence.)*
- BISHOP:** I sent for you, Mr. Wesley, because of the appalling reports that have reached my ears concerning you and your band of itinerant preachers. I ask myself, Did not John Wesley take holy orders? Does he not regard himself as a dutiful servant of the Church of England?
- JOHN WESLEY:** I do so regard myself, your Grace.
- BISHOP:** Then explain yourself! Why do you persist in annoying my clergy and disturbing my people?
- BULKELEY:** *(Barely waiting for him to finish)* Wednesbury is my parish, sir, my parish!
- HORNE:** You mislead the people with pretenses to sanctity.
- BULKELEY:** You seduce the people away by accusing the clergy of incompetence.
- HORNE:** You profane the holy gospel by preaching in the open air.
- BULKELEY:** You pretend to special revelations and gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- HORNE:** We hear that you incite the mobs to acts of violence and sedition.
- BULKELEY:** And it is my parish, sir, my parish! You have no business there.
- JOHN WESLEY:** The world is my parish, gentlemen. My business is to save souls. *(Stands and addresses the bishop)* My Lord, there are in or near Wednesbury about ten thousand souls for whom Christ died. There are thieves, drunkards, fornicators. Is Dr. Bulkeley both willing and able to stop them rushing headlong into hell? If so, let it be done, and I have no place in these parts. When there is no single soul here who might benefit

from my preaching, when all the lost sheep are gathered in, be it by Dr. Bulkeley or by myself, then I will leave.

**BISHOP:** No one is charged with the care of souls in Wednesbury parish but Dr. Bulkeley here. I cannot allow you, Mr. Wesley, to continue your preaching—

**JOHN WESLEY:** (*Urgently*) If your Lordship would but speak with some of the hundreds, nay thousands of men and women, not only in this parish but all over England, who have listened to our preaching— Speak with them, my Lord. You will learn that the habitual drunkard that was, is now temperate. He that stole steals no more. These are demonstrable facts. I can name the men—

**BULKELEY:** We do not need to hear that, sir. The plain fact is, there are ministers enough without you.

**JOHN WESLEY:** (*To Bulkeley*) But the people do not go to your churches. You cannot reach them. Are they now to be condemned because we did not go to them?

**BULKELEY:** Well, it is their own fault. If they will not come to church for their salvation, let them die and be damned.

*(There is silence.)*

**BISHOP:** Come, come, gentlemen. I am sure we can resolve this matter more amicably. Sit down, Wesley.

*(Horne pours out wine. Bishop takes Bulkeley aside and speaks to him.)*

**BISHOP:** Dr. Bulkeley, compose yourself.

**BULKELEY:** But when I think of these Methodist sects sprouting up in parish after parish— I tell you, my Lord, they're already building meeting houses for their own services.

**BISHOP:** I know, Dr. Bulkeley. But if only we can find some common ground here. We cannot doubt Mr. Wesley's sincerity. Nor can we doubt his desire to advance the Christian cause.

*(Horne reappears with wine. Offers glasses first to Bishop, then to Bulkeley and finally to Wesley.)*

**JOHN WESLEY:** I thank your Lordship. I drink nothing but water.  
*(Bulkeley, who has raised his glass to his lips, chokes on it.)*

**BISHOP:** *(Suddenly turning on Wesley, throws his wine in his face)* Damn all you water-swilling Methodist prigs. So this

is how you make your way into weak minds and feeble heads! You captivate the people by going beyond what the rules of Christianity require. But you will not beguile us, Mr. Wesley. We shall not be misled by your sanctimonious display.

**JOHN WESLEY:** I fear your Lordship has misunderstood. I began to do this about twelve years ago when I had no thought of captivating any, unless it were the Indians of Georgia. I resumed the drinking of wine about two years ago because some thought I made it a point of conscience. I thought I had to tell them, "I will do this rather than offend my brother." My Lord, I know only too well the temptation of a narrow, legalistic religion. The fact is simply that wine makes me ill.

**BISHOP:** Well, it is all of a piece. What can I expect of a man who would sink so low as to indulge in common field preaching?

**JOHN WESLEY:** I freely admit, your Grace, at first I had trouble myself becoming reconciled to this strange way of preaching.

**BULKELEY:** I should think so indeed.

**HORNE:** (*Meekly and to himself*) I—I don't think I *could do it*.

**JOHN WESLEY:** There was a time when I thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in church. But why should it be so strange to preach in an open field when our Lord himself had a mountain for his pulpit and the heavens for his sounding board?

**BULKELEY:** I told you so, your Grace. This itinerant preacher would liken himself even to the Lord! Oh, who has ever witnessed such blasphemy!

**BISHOP:** Fine speeches, Mr. Wesley, do not alter the fact that you are meddling in other priests' parishes.

**JOHN WESLEY:** Your Grace, my business on earth is to do what good I can. Wherever I think I can do the most good, there must I stay. A dispensation of the gospel has been committed to me, and woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

**BISHOP:** (*To Horne and Middleton*) I cannot talk to this man any longer. He will not listen to words of counsel and love; let him heed words of wrath and force. (*To Wesley*) Mr. Wesley, you may be warned, you and your followers, your field preachers and anyone who professes the name of Methodist: I shall charge all my reverend brethren (*Indicates Horne and Bulkeley*)—these gentlemen and all their colleagues of the

cloth—to lift up their voices like a trumpet, and warn and arm and fortify all mankind against the people called Methodists.

JOHN WESLEY:

*(Stands. Quietly, but with great intensity)* My Lord, neither you nor any man beside—let me use great plainness of speech—can oppose and fortify people against us without finding they are also fighting against God. *(Bows and leaves)* I bid you farewell. *(Turning at the door)* I wish your Lordship all happiness in time and eternity.

BISHOP:

Well, Dr. Bulkeley. There is plainly no arguing with the man. He is a raving fanatic.

BULKELEY:

A dangerous fanatic, my Lord.

HORNE:

But—but—

BULKELEY:

Well, Horne?

BISHOP:

You have something to say, Horne? Speak up. Speak up.

HORNE:

Well,—er—well, your Grace. I venture to suggest that we let the horrid little movement collapse under its own weight *(Slight pause, then very hesitantly)* if indeed it can be made to collapse at all.

BISHOP:

*(Realizes he is still holding wine glass, pushes it petulantly into Horne's hands and storms out)* Pahl!

*(Bulkeley and Horne look at each other.)*

BULKELEY:

You will learn, Horne, that preferment does not go to men who make remarks like that.

HORNE:

I know. But doesn't he realize?

BULKELEY:

Realize what?

HORNE:

The power—the power of God in that man.

BULKELEY:

I should not be the one to tell the bishop that, Mr. Horne.

*(Bulkeley places his glass into Horne's hands and exits leaving Horne, clutching feebly at the three goblets, looking up in dismay as the lights dim.)*

## Blackout

## Scene III

*(People from the first scene now converge on stage in twos and threes from various directions, greeting one another and talking quietly, perhaps carrying benches. A Methodist meeting is about to begin.)*

**MARTHA:** (*As Philip and Grace enter*) Catherine, look! There's Philip Jenkinson. Who would have thought to see him come to a meeting?

**CATHERINE:** Who would have thought a few days ago that any of us would be here?

**MARTHA:** Morning, Philip Jenkinson! It's good to have you with us.

**PHILIP:** Good day, Martha Rutledge. I had no idea I'd be meeting you here!

**MARTHA:** (*Laughing*) We were just saying the same thing about you.

**SUSAN:** Did you practice that new piece?

**CATHERINE:** We did practice indeed. But it didn't take much work. It's easy to sing.

**GRACE:** I know. Whatever we feel, Charles Wesley seems able to put it into words. Just as though you knew what it was before you started.

**EDWARD:** That's why the church people are so down on us. They say Charles Wesley's hymns are too singable, more fit for the tavern than the church.

**BEN:** They would say that. They like their music so complicated it takes a professional choir to sing it.

**MARY:** Vulgar, that's what they say we are. Methodism's a religion for servants, they say.

**GRACE:** Well, we are servants.

**BEN:** Why should the Devil have all the good tunes anyway? That's what John Wesley says.

**SUSAN:** Come now, friends, let's begin. Does everyone have copies of the new hymn?

**MARTHA:** "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling?" Yes, we have it.

**SUSAN:** Now then. We're not a great choir. We may sound painful. But think of John Wesley standing up before that crowd and sing it for him. And think of the words, what they mean.

**BEN:** What do they mean, Mrs. Dell?

**SUSAN:** Well, they mean, well, just exactly what they say.

**PHILIP:** I know what they say. But what do they mean?

**SUSAN:** I just told you. They mean, uh, well—oh, Grace, you tell them.

- GRACE:** I hardly know how to say it. All I know is, well, I was confused. I was empty. Nobody wanted me. And then John Wesley came and spoke that morning. I never knew God existed. Well, I suppose I knew. But I thought he only liked people—like Reverend Bulkeley. Now I know he likes me. Jesus isn't just a word for me. I know he likes me because he really is all compassion. Like the hymn says.
- MARTHA:** Yes. That's right.
- SUSAN:** We know that, Grace. It shows in everything you do. Listen, you take the solo part. We'll sing Charles' new hymn now.
- ALL:** Love divine, all loves excelling,  
Joy of heaven, to earth come down;  
Fix in us thy humble dwelling;  
All thy faithful mercies crown!
- Jesus, thou art all compassion,  
Pure, unbounded love thou art;  
Visit us with thy salvation;  
Enter every trembling heart.
- (All sing the first four lines with great enthusiasm. Grace begins singing solo, unaccompanied, second half stanza. Before she has completed it, there is a terrific knocking on the door and with no pause two drunken Constables charge in waving sticks and snatching music from people's hands. Grace stops singing.)*
- FIRST CONSTABLE:** Here, here! Get over there! An Edict is to be read. *(He herds the people over to the side, pushing one of the women over as he does so, and stands over them with a stick. Another woman begins crying.)*
- EDWARD:** What have we done?
- SECOND CONSTABLE:** That'll do. I don't want no nonsense out of you. You be quiet and you'll find out!
- FIRST CONSTABLE:** *(Snatching copy of hymn)* Here! Give me that. What is it? Seditious material! *(Glances quickly over sheet and rips it up)* Pernicious stuff! Popish. Worse than Popish!
- (While the Edict is being read, he moves among the group, snatching music and tearing it up.)*
- SECOND CONSTABLE:** *(Reading from large parchment)* To all High-Constables, Petty-Constables, and other of His Majesty's Peace Officers, within the County of Shropshire, and particularly to the Constable of Wednesbury. *(Pause)* That's me. Whereas, we His Majesty's Justices of the

Peace for the said County of Shropshire, having received information that several disorderly persons, styling themselves Methodist preachers, go about raising routs and riots, to the great damage of His Majesty's liege people, and against the peace of our Sovereign Lord the King: These are, in His Majesty's name, to command you to make diligent search after the said Methodist preachers, and to bring them before some of us His said Majesty's Justices of the Peace, to be examined concerning their unlawful doings. (*Waves Edict wildly in air*) Given under our hands and seals, this day of October, 1743. Signed John Lane William Persehouse.

FIRST CONSTABLE: Now then, you miserable Methodists, where is he?

BEN: He, sir?

FIRST CONSTABLE: (*Takes swipe at him with his stick*) No impertinence from you! Wesley. Where is the little vermin?

GRACE: We've no idea, sir.

SECOND CONSTABLE: Concealing him are you? Well, he won't get far. There's a mob out there looking for him. And the harder you make it for us, the harder we'll make it for him.

MARTHA: What has he done to you?

EDWARD: What has he done to anyone?

SECOND CONSTABLE: Stirring up riots, breach of the peace, you heard the Edict. Come on, let's make a diligent search.

(*The Constables, swinging their sticks, charge the crowd. The crowd, terrified, disperse running.*)

FIRST CONSTABLE: (*In doorway*) Hold on, Sam! Something's happening out there! (*Pause followed by shouts, noise of stones being thrown in the distance.*) I thought so! They've tracked him down. Come on, follow me! (*The Constables run out*)

### Blackout

(*The noises continue a while longer, gradually fading into silence. During the noise the bed is brought back on stage. A solo instrument begins playing "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" [tune: Austria], allowing what extra time is needed for the scene change. As John and Charles come down the aisle, the solo instrument fades out.*)

### Scene IV

(*John and Charles come down the aisle from the back of the building with a spotlight on them. John has been badly beaten; his head is bandaged, he wears no coat and his*

*shirt is torn and filthy. Charles guides and supports him. When they get to the bed, the lights go up. Charles helps John into the bed, wraps him in a shawl, and pulls the coverlet up around him. John now looks as he did at the beginning of the play.)*

- JOHN WESLEY: They were throwing bricks. One of them must have hit me.
- CHARLES WESLEY: No, the bricks only grazed your shoulders. When they saw you unharmed, and still speaking words of kindness, one of them grew so furious that he struck you on the chest with all his might. And then another came and hit you on the mouth with such force that the blood gushed out immediately.
- JOHN WESLEY: But it's my head that is hurting.
- CHARLES WESLEY: You must have struck something sharp, reeling from the blow. Is the pain not letting up at all?
- JOHN WESLEY: It doesn't matter. *(Very urgently)* Our people, Charles! Our friends! What became of them?
- CHARLES WESLEY: I don't know. But I do know that Grace and Ben will keep them together.
- JOHN WESLEY: That's right. They can be injured, but their faith cannot be shaken. No more than yours or mine, can it?
- CHARLES WESLEY: *(Smiling)* Grace will have another meeting under way by this time tomorrow. I don't know where, but—brother? *(In sudden concern as John, with a groan, drops back upon the pillow)*
- JOHN WESLEY: Truly, Charles, I feel weak. I believe the end is near. Oh, Charles, I have one last request. Listen to me closely. The words for my tombstone— This is what I want them to write: Here lieth the body of John Wesley, a brand plucked out of the burning: who died in the fifty-first year of his age not leaving, after his debts are paid, ten pounds behind him: praying, God be merciful to me, an unprofitable servant.
- CHARLES WESLEY: John, you're not going to die. The Revival has barely begun.
- JOHN WESLEY: It will not last long in any event.
- CHARLES WESLEY: What?
- JOHN WESLEY: Our people are getting rich. They live soberly, they work diligently. They must prosper. 'Tis hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Oh, Charles, pray for me that I may not forsake the faith in my hour of death. *(John closes his eyes.)*